

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN STATEMENT ON THE RELEASE OF THE FY04 DEFENSE BUDGET

Defense Budget Growing But Still Short

Washington, D.C. - House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter issued the following statement regarding the Fiscal Year 2004 Department of Defense budget request.

“While I commend President Bush for continuing to increase the defense budget, to a point more than \$70 billion above the last Clinton budget, I must warn that this falls short of the requirements of this dangerous era.

“Much remains to be done to counter the massive force reduction under the last administration. The Army was cut from 18 divisions to ten, the number of active Air Force wings from 24 to 13, and the number of Navy ships was cut from 546 to about 300.

“The budget is still too low to fully counter the dangers America presently faces. If we are going to meet our goal of air dominance in multiple theaters, we need at least two additional air wings. Further, the need for sustained deep strike capability should compel expanding the long-range bomber force by fielding 50 additional aircraft with stealth characteristics and precision capabilities.

“Current operations in Afghanistan and the build up in the Middle East indicate a long term requirement for projection of U.S. war materiel over great distances. Therefore, additional airlift above and beyond the President’s request of 11 C-17s, is also justified.

“Additional munitions, especially precision munitions, are necessary to replenish weapons used in recent overseas missions. As a safeguard, an insurance margin should be built in over the next several years, by expending an additional \$3 billion per year for war reserves.

“Ship numbers are bottoming out at less than half of President Reagan’s 600-ship Navy. These low numbers, especially in the area of attack subs, should be bolstered.

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“Terrorists and other nations intent on hurting America can be expected to concentrate on developing and delivering chemical and biological weapons. The administration recognizes this and I support increased resources for detecting such weapons and responding to potential incidents. America also needs a system that can analyze a new poison shortly after its introduction and produce a defense mechanism that can be fielded quickly to counter the specific substance.

“The Bush Administration should be commended for developing and moving to field missile defense systems which will give America the ability to counter the entire array of offensive missile threats. I believe additional space assets should be used to the fullest extent to enhance all aspects of missile defense.

“The President’s budget allots \$72 billion in the area of modernization; however, to replace our major military platforms like tanks, ships and aircraft, we need at least \$90 billion per year. As a result of this shortfall, Army helicopters now average 18.6 years of age and two-thirds of our Navy aircraft are more than 15 years old. Thus, while the Bush budget is much greater than those of the Clinton era, it falls short of the amount needed to equip our forces with modern platforms.

“In sum, the President’s defense budget, while a major increase over the budgets of the last decade, fails to provide for the military dominance that should be our standard in this dangerous era. An additional \$30 billion for modernization, \$3 billion for munitions, \$5 billion for fielding additional tactical air and bomber wings, and \$5 billion for increase readiness and chemical/biological protections should be built into next years budget.

“The bottom line: we are some \$70 billion above the last Clinton budget, but well short of where we need to be.”

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